

WALKIN' AFTER MIDNIGHT

Eva Cassidy's *Walkin' After Midnight* collection was recorded on the second November, 1995, at The King of France Tavern, located in The Maryland Inn, downtown Annapolis.

The Maryland Inn performances have long been among my Eva favorites. Five have appeared on previous Eva albums. Until recently I had been under the impression that the Maryland Inn date was booked as a warm-up for the now famous Blues Alley live recording sessions scheduled for just after the upcoming New Year, on the second and third of January, 1996. But, it didn't add up. Two of Eva's regular band mates, keyboard player Lenny Williams and drummer Raice MacLeod, didn't make the Maryland Inn gig. Instead of the usual line-up, it was just Eva and her acoustic guitar, accompanied by the other half of her band, Chris Biondo on bass and Keith Grimes on electric guitar, with guest artist Bruno Nasta. An award winning crossover classical, jazz and rock violinist from the D.C./Baltimore area, Nasta's credits range from The National Gallery Orchestra to his improvisatory violin solos featured on the Grammy™ winning *Bon Appétit* album by Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer.

The intriguing thing about this one night batch of recordings is the way Eva's voice dances in the space created by the absence of additional instruments. While Bruno Nasta somehow morphed from a symphony violinist into a fiddle player, the band's virtuoso blues/rock guitarist, Keith Grimes, responded with a lighter touch more befitting, dare I say it, a Western Swing Band.

Those who saw the Ken Burns Country Music Public Television mini-series documentary, along with disappearing dyed-in-the-wool Western Swing fans, will recall artists like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, who performed much of the same repertoire as the jazz and pop bands of their day. The same songs, with different instruments, often featured fiddle/lead electric guitar interplay.

While re-listening during the Covid shut down I noticed the 'Western Swing' phrase doodled on my old Maryland Inn track list, with a question mark. The penny finally dropped. Distinctly different Eva Cassidy magic had been hiding in plain sight.

Neither Chris Biondo nor Keith Grimes could shed light on how the gig came about. Chris said it was all Eva's doing. She invited Bruno to sit in, Bruno showed up and Chris, as always (thank you, Chris!), plugged a DAT recorder into

the house PA system. Keith was surprised, and a little annoyed, after many band rehearsals, to find himself playing with an unrehearsed fiddle player. But it worked out. He and Bruno became friends over the years, and Bruno added his instrument to several of the five Emmy™ winning National Geographic Channel scores created by Lenny Williams and Chris Biondo.

Bruno Nasta had initially met Eva at a Four Seasons Hotel wedding in Tysons Corner (greater Vienna), Virginia, where Eva was performing. Bruno, whose band was playing in the same hotel that night, beheld Eva for the first time, and vice versa. When I spoke with him about this project, Bruno remembered his first impression of Eva: "beyond critique, pure joy." He didn't recall why Eva had invited him to her Maryland Inn adventure but, "It may have had to do with Eva missing playing with her brother Dan, a superb fiddler who had moved to Iceland." When I asked him about a deft group modulation going into the final chorus of the title song, Bruno confirmed there had been no rehearsal. He was simply winging it "whenever those blue eyes signaled me to come in." The modulation "must have been a couple of hours into the show, after I settled into Keith's hand cues."

On November 2, 1995, Eva Cassidy's Blues Alley date lay a scant two months into her future. One year, to the day, after her Maryland Inn performance she would be gone.

Twenty-nine years on, Eva Cassidy's musical legacy around the world continues to expand. These twelve tracks are all previously unreleased Eva recordings, comprised of eleven previously released songs along with one previously unreleased song: "Down Home Blues." Together, they are literally a ticket back to Eva's accidental Western Swing Night.

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